

PHOTOGRAPHS BY DAVID GINSBERG

"VIETNAM IS LIKE A STEP BACK IN TIME,"  
SAYS GINSBERG, RIDING NEAR CHAM TEMPLE.



*"My wife and I live all alone.  
In a little brown jug we call our home.  
She likes coffee. I like tea.  
And we're as happy as can be.  
Ha-Ha-Ha! You and me, little brown  
jug don't I love thee.  
Ha-Ha-Ha! You and me, little brown  
jug don't I love thee."*

**M**y habit was to sing that song whenever I found myself surrounded by a staring squad of folks who probably had never seen a foreigner, let alone a foreigner on a yellow mountain bike. I last sang it to a throng of wide-eyed Vietnamese hill-tribe people as I stuffed a new tube in my front tire. The "ha-ha-ha" chorus is good for a few laughs, and it was a kick to stare in the eyes of the prettiest girl in town as I sang "don't I love thee." No one

knew what I was saying, but it really loosened 'em up and often brought an invite from the richest guy in town to sit with him as his wife and daughters poured tea.

In September 1990, I set out to bicycle around the world to raise money for Oxfam America, an international nonprofit organization that fights poverty and hunger in 28 nations. It took me nearly three years, but what I learned will stay with me forever.

I've been a bicycle tourist since the age of 14, and in 1981, after graduating from SU, I pedaled across the United States. On that tour, I was overwhelmed by hospitality to the point of guilt.

"Are you doing good?" Professor Bill Coplin taught us to ask ourselves in his Policy Studies 101 class. I was doing nothing more for my fellow man than spouting a few tales from the road for small-town newspapers. I soon realized if I was involved with a

worthy cause, I would have something else to talk about besides myself (after all, it's really tiring when the 2,000th person asks you how many flat tires you've had) and the charity would benefit with publicity and funds. As I neared California I formulated my next goal: a world bicycle tour for the benefit of a charity that helps people worldwide.

It didn't happen overnight. I returned to New York and spent the next nine years selling paper products. Everything fell into place one happy day when my employers offered to buy the rights to my account base. That, in addition to other savings, gave me enough money to leave it all behind.

I sold my turbo Saab, rented a storage room for my TV, VCR, car phone, and business suits, and as I closed the door on a chapter of my life, I vowed I would never wear a tie again.

Before starting, I sent letters to everyone I knew asking for donations to Oxfam based on how far I intended

# AROUND THE WORLD IN 962 DAYS

[DAVID GINSBERG SET OFF ON A WORLDWIDE TOUR TO RAISE MONEY FOR CHARITY.  
NEARLY 25,000 MILES AND 40 FLAT TIRES LATER, HE RETURNED.]

BY DAVID GINSBERG





TIBET, NEAR MT. EVEREST. GINSBERG BUCKED BAD ROADS, CIRCUMSPECT WEATHER, "VAMPIRE" FLIES, AND THIS COAT ON HIS JOURNEY.

to ride: 25,000 miles, the approximate distance around the Earth. Oxfam supports 267 locally established and managed projects that help people gain the resources they need to work and become self-sufficient. Nice, but was Oxfam really doing any good? I wanted to see for myself.

**I** pedaled through America, the Caribbean, South America, Europe, the Middle East, Africa, and Asia. I visited countries with Oxfam projects in Haiti, Ecuador, India, Bangladesh, Cambodia, and Vietnam. At an Oxfam-funded school in rural Kulna, Bangladesh, I realized Oxfam *is* making a difference in peoples' lives. Before the school existed, children worked with their parents on farms. Attending school meant a long walk to town, too distant to get home in time to help harvest crops, so kids grew up without education. The community applied for Oxfam funding to build one-

room mud-walled schoolhouses, and today there are 13 such schools. From first through sixth grade, the children study three hours each day. They grow into adults who can read, write, and compute. With those skills they increase their

opportunities. They can market produce, get a non-farm job, or when a monsoon, flood, or drought makes farming impossible, they can run small businesses. I was satisfied knowing the money I raised meant Oxfam could support more projects like these.

In America, no one would complain if I had only done the trip to satisfy my wanderlust, but at that moment, listening to the kids sing a song in their palm-frond roofed school, I was glad it had a greater purpose.

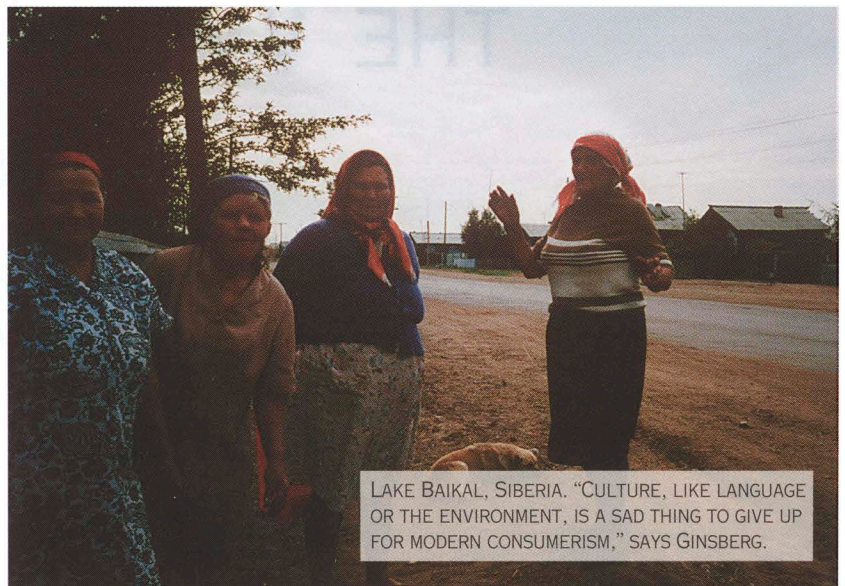
**Y**ou still want to know how many flat tires I had? Forty punctures. What else do you want to know?

*How far did I ride?* 24,616 miles.

*How far did I ride on average each day?* 62.64 miles.

*Did I bike every day?* I rode on 393 days; I did not ride on 569 days when I rested, visited sights or friends, read, wrote, studied language, did Oxfam slide presentations and interviews, or traveled by other means.

*What's the most I rode in one day?* 137 miles on the road to Steamboat



LAKE BAIKAL, SIBERIA. "CULTURE, LIKE LANGUAGE OR THE ENVIRONMENT, IS A SAD THING TO GIVE UP FOR MODERN CONSUMERISM," SAYS GINSBERG.



Springs, Colorado.

*How much money did I raise?* \$10,000. Oxfam was happy with the money, but they also saw the trip had bigger potential because of the publicity. The trip generated about 30 newspaper articles internationally, many that went out over wire services, and as many radio interviews. So millions of people have become aware of Oxfam.

*Did I take pictures?* Yes, 5,904.

*Did I have any adventures?* A few: I was mugged in Moscow; pick-pocketed in Bucharest and Tanzania; swindled by money changers in Romania; out of water in the Gobi desert; detained by a Mongolian soldier who pointed an AK-47 at my head; arrested in China; handed body remains in Vietnam; surprised by a midnight intruder I coaxed out of my tent in Utah; and ambushed by fire ants in Louisiana. When I finish writing it, you'll be able to read these stories in my book about the trip.

*What did I learn?* In spite of our outer differences, people everywhere are very much the same. Despite what we see in the media, the world is composed of good-hearted people. We all have the same basic needs and share an equal right to satisfy them. Our souls could have been planted by the creator anywhere—we had nothing to do with why we were given the bodies we occupy and why we were born where we were. In our globally aware world, those of us born into rich societies are all the more responsible to help those born into poor societies. We must be careful while helping others that we do not cause people to sacrifice their culture, because culture, like the environment, is a sad thing to give up in favor of modern consumerism. The challenge is to keep traditions alive in today's world.

*How have I changed?* Around a fire in the foothills of the Himalayas, my Nepali friends sang folk songs to my companion and me. They asked us to sing. It was then that I realized how shallow our roots really were. We could barely squeeze out a complete



"HAPPINESS COMES FROM WITHIN," SAYS GINSBERG, RESTING NEAR DALLAT, VIETNAM.

verse to any American folk song. The cumulative years we had spent watching TV, videos, and movies, they had spent singing ancient songs. I decided then I wanted to know the songs of my roots. These days I get in touch most mornings, when I study under an Orthodox Jewish rabbi. That may sound like an about-face for a former wanderer, but travel is a search—for some a search for truth—and in Judaism I am finding more truth than anywhere else. ■

*David Ginsberg, who earned his SU bachelor's degree in transportation and distribution management and policy studies in 1981, finished the world bicycle tour for Oxfam America in October 1993. He lives in New London, Connecticut, where he's writing a book about the trip. This summer he led tours for Bike Vermont.*

